



SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER OF THE QUIET PROFESSIONALS

SPECIAL FORCES ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 78

The LTC Frank J. Dallas Chapter

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 9 • SEPTEMBER 2024

From the Archive
Special Edition



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From the Archive: Special Edition

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FRONT COVER: RT Mamba from CCN on a prisoner snatch mission (SOA-B53). (Photo courtesy Jim [Jones] Shorten)

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The *Sentinel* is published monthly by Special Forces Association Chapter 78, Southern California — **art direction and design by Debra Holm, Dinwiddie Holm Graphics**. The views, opinions and articles printed in this issue do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army or the United States Special Operations Command, the Special Forces Association, or Special Forces Association Chapter 78. Please address any comments to the editor at sfachapter78@gmail.com.



From the Editor | September 2024



How Miller
Sentinel Editor

This month's Sentinel is comprised, almost entirely, of stories that have already received acclaim because they have been previously printed and archived in PDF form. These very interesting articles will now be available to more easily read online and to be more easily found by a search.

Our August *Sentinel* "From the Archive" feature story was Part One of Travis Mills' three-part series "MACV-SOG One-Zero School." The first installment "FOB4 Overrun on August 23,

1968" described his experience during the attack, where he was critically wounded. In Part Two, "School Development and Assignment of Class One," we rejoin Mills thirty-one days after his return to duty at FOB4, at his own insistence. As a One-Zero-qualified officer, he was tasked with establishing a "Recon Team Leader's Course" (One-Zero School) in Camp Long Thanh. The goal was to develop a comprehensive training program for future leaders of reconnaissance missions within MACV-SOG, the highly classified, predominantly Special Forces unit. Known as One-Zero's after their radio call sign, these team leaders would undergo rigorous training. In this installment, originally published in the April 2018 *Sentinel*, Mills details how he and his team of experienced One-Zero's and One-One's worked together to develop the course and formulate a training schedule.

Retired Green Beret Scott Mann is a whirlwind of meaningful accomplishments—from his Rooftop Leadership programs, producing and starring in the amazing play *Last Out*, leading "Task Force Pineapple" which focused on aiding the SF-partnered Afghan exodus, and then writing a book about it, *Operation Pineapple Express*, to running non-profits helping veterans. He now has a new book entitled *Nobody is Coming to Save You* that will be available in October.

Legend (about the life of MACV-SOG Medal of Honor recipient, Green Beret Raul Perez "Roy" Benavidez), written by Eric Blehm, is reviewed by our own eloquent SOG veteran, John Stryker Meyer. Originally published in the July 2015 *Sentinel*.

"Beirut Lebanon (1983)" by Jim Wiehe tells about the SF MTT mission to train Lebanese officers and soldiers. A particularly hairy part of the mission was the August 29, 1983 attack on 10thSFG HQ at the Cadmos Hotel. Originally published in the July 2021 *Sentinel*.

Murphy's Law by Jack Murphy is reviewed by our Kenn Miller. Ken quickly gets to the heart of the book. This originally appeared in the December 2020 *Sentinel* along with the following excerpt.

The excerpt from *Murphy's Law* is called "The Wedding Crashers." It starts as a critique of the state of affairs of SF and the Rangers and ends up describing an operation to capture an ISIS operative—at his wedding.

Finally, feel free to "visit" our July Chapter 78 meeting and see more issues of the *Sentinel* at www.specialforces78.com. ❖

How Miller, *Sentinel* Editor

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Special Forces Association Chapter 78 Meeting

Date: 21 September 2024

Time: 0800

Location: Courtyard by Marriott
5865 Katella Avenue
Cypress, CA 90630



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SFA Chapter 78 Monthly Meeting

September 21, 2024

Breakfast – 0800 • Meeting – 0830

Courtyard by Marriott

5865 Katella Ave, Room A, Cypress, CA 90630

2024 Meeting Schedule

October 19 | November 16
December (to be announced)

MACV-SOG One-Zero School

Part II in the Series:

School Development and Assignment of Class One



Travis Mills

By Travis Mills

Originally published in the April 2018 *Sentinel*

I spent 31 days on the Sanctuary and then returned to FOB 4. When I got back to camp it was noon meal time. It was a bittersweet reception. Seeing old friends and learning of the ones that were gone. My old hooch was now occupied by new guys and all my stuff was in a foot locker in supply waiting to be shipped back to the states. I was assigned a room in the transient quarters. The next day I went to the S-1 and S-3 to see about getting back on the team and getting back in the game, but life had other plans.

I had been able to talk my way out of the hospital and back to camp rather than being sent to Japan for rehab. So I was assigned to work with Maj. Toomey until I was recovered enough to get back on a team. After a couple of weeks, Maj. Toomey said SOG Headquarters in Saigon had sent a levy for a One-Zero qualified officer to start up a "Recon Team Leader's Course" (One-Zero School) in Camp Long Thanh. He told me this would be a good assignment, give me time to "heal up" and in couple of months come back to the FOB to get back on a team.

The next day I was on the "milk run" to SOG Headquarters I was given a quick briefing by Col. Cavanaugh (Chief SOG) and Col. Johnson (Chief OP 35). Basically, SOG was in a difficult position because of recent heavy losses of experienced One-Zeros and increased demands for missions. The vast majority of the replacements had no SOG experience and there was not enough experienced One-Zeros to train them, let alone field as many teams required by the demands from MACV. The classic Army solution was "Start a School". Then I was handed off to a MAJ in the S-3. He gave me a US Army Manual on Patrolling and a general outline for a 21-day "patrolling course". The course was to be conducted at Camp Long Thanh and I would be assigned one experienced One-Zero or One-One from each of the FOB's as instructors. I would go to Long Thanh the next day and the first group of students would arrive in 3 weeks.

The next day I was escorted to Long Thanh by the MAJ from S-3 and introduced to the CO and the OPS Officer as "the person who will be organizing and running the new team leader school." By the look on their face, I had a feeling this was the first time they had heard of this new school. With that, the MAJ stated he had to leave in order to get back to Saigon before it got dark and the road closed. After he left, the CO and S-3 began asking all kinds of questions about who, how many, when, how long, about logistics (food, lodging, training materials, ammunition), etc., etc. I showed them the Patrolling Manual and the

one page training outline. We all agreed we had better have a long meeting tomorrow. I was given a bunk the transient quarters and as I lay down that night my only thought was "What in the hell have I gotten into?"

Camp Long Thanh was a very unique camp. On the 5th Group Organization Chart it was listed as B-53. It was about 35 miles SE of Saigon about 5 miles off of Hwy 15. It was rumored to have been established by the French prior to WWII, supposedly it had been occupied by the Japanese during WWII and reoccupied by the French after WWII until their withdrawal from Viet Nam. Upon their departure it was taken over initially by the CIA, and eventually by MACV-SOG. From the very beginning it had always been a highly secretive site and occupied by very high level intelligence units. The camp was quite large and very compartmentalized. There were several "compounds" within the camp, that unless you had the correct clearance and/or need to know, you didn't ask questions or try to enter. It was home to the projects "Borden", STRATA, as well as many others never acknowledged. There was a small airstrip just south of the camp where a steady stream of C-130 and C-123 "Blackbirds" picked up and dropped off non-descript teams and supplies. Everyone in the camp wore sterile uniforms (unmarked tiger suits), and when outsiders visited they were required to turn their jackets inside out to mask names, ranks, etc.

Due to the camp being established so long and occupied by these "secret organizations" with very substantial "discretionary funds", the accommodations were quite extraordinary for a "combat zone". If you were permanent party in this camp you had an individual, air conditioned room, with clean starched sheets. The dining facility was one of the best in Viet Nam. The chief cook had been the "chef" at the embassy, but he had two draft aged sons. So one of the previous CO's made the offer if he would come to the camp, the camp would hire his two sons as part of the security staff, which would give them a complete deferment of the Vietnamese Draft, and they would be assigned temporary (permanent) duty as his KP assistants. As the saying goes; "it was an offer he couldn't refuse." The mess sergeant made regular trips to the Saigon docks when the Navy ships were in with a truck load of "War Trophy's" (VC Flags, VC Sandals, etc. — made by the camp sew-girls, sprinkled with chicken blood and a few bullet holes) to trade for the Navy rations. The end result: Life was good at Camp Long Thanh.

Initially it was a strange relationship. Long Thanh was an OP 34 camp and I (and the instructors coming later) were from OP 35 and definitely considered "outsiders". I at first, and the instructors when they arrived, were given very specific guidelines and restrictions on where we could go around the camp and what we could do,

and especially don't be asking any questions that didn't specifically pertain to the One-Zero school. Even though this One-Zero school seemed to be pretty high on OP 35's priority list, it didn't seem too high to the OP 34 list. I was told in Saigon the camp would provide logistical support, i.e., training facilities, materials, ammunition, and transportation. The S-4 told me to submit a list of what I needed and they would forward it to SOG S-4. SOG S-4 didn't seem to have a very high priority on our requests, so we received only about 30% of the materials requested. I was told this is a new project and supplies are limited, so you'll have to make do with what you've got.

Near the end of the first week the instructors started showing up at the camp. They were all experienced One-Zero's or One-One's. Just like me, they were told to go the airfield, get on a blackbird and get off at Long Thanh. Most of them had been told very little about the project and were also told they were only "on loan" to the school for a couple of cycles. As a result no one had any orders other than the "special travel orders" from the FOB's and the infamous "get out of jail free" card. Those "special travel orders" identified the bearer as a member of MACV Studies and Observations Group, a highly sensitive unit and verified the bearer had all the sufficient security clearances and authorization for travel via the "Blackbirds" and/or Air America. Most of them were not very happy to be there, they wanted to be back at their FOB with their team. A couple of them had an injury and were sent to the school while they healed up. The only thing that made it somewhat palatable was the opportunity of an occasional trip to Saigon.

We were provided a barracks type building that was previously used by the STRATA Teams. We used half for bunks and the other half as a work area for class preparation. In the days (and nights) before the instructors arrived I had been racking my brain to come up with a training program that would provide "keep you alive" information and mission essential skills. I thought back to my first days on a recon team: What knowledge and skills would I liked to have had that first time I jumped off that Kingbee 20 miles from nowhere? We spent the first two days just sitting in a circle getting to know each other and formulating a plan. I told them, "You guys are still 1-0's, you've just got a different mission for a little while. These guys we're getting are new to SOG. You guys, better than anyone, know that Prairie Fire and Daniel Boone recon is an entirely different animal. There are no manuals – it's all acquired knowledge from being on the ground and coming back alive. Our job is to teach them that knowledge and those skills so when they go back to their FOB, they can be an immediate asset to their team. The teams now are so heavily committed the 1-0's don't have the luxury of spending a week or two to train new guys — they have to be ready and able to contribute within a few days of being assigned to a team. We will have two weeks here — then we all go to FOB 2 for the 'final exam': to be assigned a target and launched. FOB 2 agreed to this plan because their teams are over committed and 3 or 4 extra teams will help relieve some of the pressure and give their teams a much needed break. These will be real targets, so take your side of the training very seriously because these "students" will be your team. When you come back from the mission, if you give your approval, the "students" will be given a handshake, a pat on the back, a Zippo lighter with the SOG crest, a very sincere "Keep Your Head Down", and a ride to the airfield to catch a blackbird back to their FOB. We come back here for a one week break to get ready for the next cycle of students to arrive,

then we do it again. How long will this school last? I don't know. Col. Johnson, Chief of OP 35 told me we will continue until there are no more new guys to train. At the current rate of our losses, we may be here quite some time. You will be here until your FOB sends a replacement."

With that piece of business out of the way, we launched into a brain storming session of what are the most critical subjects and skills they need to learn and how we are going to get it all done in two weeks. Each one had their own opinion of what was most important as well the differences in operating procedures between the Prairie Fire and Daniel Boone AO's. At the end of a very long day, we had compiled a preliminary list of subjects and tasks.

The next day we began to formulate a training schedule. Because the vast majority of the "students" will be new to SOG, we felt it extremely important that the very first thing was to emphasize that our "business" is vastly different than anything they have ever seen or been involved in before. This is not just some glorified long range patrolling. The standard mission is 7 days, but very few last that long. Once you get off that helicopter the only "friendly's" are the other members of your team and Covey (a forward air controller dedicated to SOG). You and your team immediately become one of the most hunted groups in the country. The North Vietnamese take it so seriously, there is a real bounty on the SOG teams and they have a special, highly trained unit whose sole mission is to hunt down and destroy SOG teams. You will always be outnumbered. Sometimes it's only 2 or 3 to 1, but it can rapidly and easily escalate to 100's to 1. Once the enemy knows you're in the area, they will devote entire regiments to find and kill you. You will be operating up to 17 miles deep into enemy territory. And because we do operate so deep across the border, once the helicopters insert you they are only able to stay in the area a short time, then they have to go back to refuel and rearm. If you get in trouble, it can take up to an hour before they can get back to you. There is no mortar or artillery support. In Prairie Fire you have air support, but in Daniel Boone you only have helicopter gunship support. In some areas there is communication through a relay site, but as a general rule, Covey is your only communication and your lifeline. Running recon is a tremendously hazardous business, and if there is a secret to success and survival, it's knowledge and training. Every one of these instructors are experienced 1-0's or 1-1's. Our mission over the next two weeks is to share as much of that knowledge and experience, both the successes and mistakes, so you can make a significant contribution to your team. Your "final exam" will be a mission on a real target. This is very serious business, so pay attention and train hard.

Once we had their attention, the next subject was to define the mission of SOG. The primary mission is gathering intelligence. There are some direct action missions, but those are primarily for the Hatchet Forces. Your ultimate goal is to be inserted into your target area, spend your time gathering the intelligence and being extracted and no one ever knowing you were there. Unfortunately that rarely happens. Although your mission is not to go in and "shoot up" the place, you and your team will be among the most heavily armed groups in the country. If you are discovered by the enemy, your survival depends on being able to win that fight even though you're heavily outnumbered and outgunned and a long way from help. Some of the advantages you have are: 1. stealth; 2. a small team (6 to 8 men) can move fast; 3. intensive training and 4. precise team execution.

By stealth we don't necessarily mean slinking around in the shadows, but more of being able to move through the area silently and invisibly. You will be carrying a lot of equipment, weapons, etc. Almost all of them are made of some type of metal and/or hard plastic. Unless properly prepared, every time you move or take a step, these things make noise. As a 1-0, it is your responsibility to ensure every member of your team has sufficiently "silenced" his gear. One of the first things is to get rid of is the standard rifle sling. It and the attachment swivels make lots of "hard noise". Remove the sling, and secure or remove the sling swivels. All other equipment that can come in contact with another hard object must be secured or cushioned so it doesn't make hard noise. Your movements and "noise" must blend with the natural sounds of the jungle and it is essential that you hear "them" before they hear you. Not only must you "silence" your gear, you have to communicate silently. Once you're on the ground, talking must be held to an absolute minimum. You must have your team so well trained and drilled, that 95% of communications can be done with hand and arm signals. The first time you are lying beside a trail and observe an NVA unit move by, you will be amazed how much noise they make and how far you can hear them coming. It will totally confirm the importance of silence in your movements.

The other part of stealth is being invisible. It is obvious that means blending with the surrounding environment, and most importantly covering your trail. It is almost impossible for 6 or 8 men, carrying very heavy loads (rucksacks & weapons), to move through the jungle and not leave evidence of their passing. The "tail gunner" is one of the most important members of your team. He must understand the importance of covering the trail and how to remove and/or camouflage the signs of your passing. In our operational areas the enemy employs highly skilled trackers. These are usually people who are native to the area and extremely familiar with the local terrain. If they can pick up your trail and determine the direction of travel, their familiarity of area will allow them to use a parallel trail to get ahead of you and assist the local unit in setting up an ambush, and just lie in wait for you. As a general rule they will not follow your trail directly or too close. They will travel off to the side and far enough back to be out of sight, but within hearing distance. If they can't get ahead of you, they will track you to your RON site, then one will go back and guide a larger, heavily armed unit to overrun your RON site. You have to always be aware of the possibility of trackers and take the necessary precautions. On the other side, even though there's a good chance you have trackers, don't let that panic you into taking unnecessary risks. You may occasionally run into tracker dogs. The dogs are not as big a threat as the human trackers. The dogs are usually not well trained and tend to bark, alerting you they are there. There are several things to deter the dogs such as powdered CS, pepper mixed with dried blood, etc. During the movement techniques phase, we'll talk about ways to evade, elude, and possibly eliminate trackers. Although it may be close to impossible to not leave some evidence of your passing through the area, the important objective is to make it as difficult as possible for the enemy to detect your trail. The more difficult you make it, the more likely they will make an error and if you know they are there you can take appropriate actions.

Although these were only three of the many tragic events within SOG, they were significant teaching tools to emphasize to the students the seriousness of our operations. They drove home the point that your

team will be hunted like animals and in order to survive you have to be at the top of your game every minute you are on the ground. Contrary to popular belief, the enemy that is hunting you is very, very good, extremely dedicated and unrelentingly persistent. If there is just one thing you take away from this course, it should be that just one minute of inattention can result total disaster.

The next topic area was gear. The choice of uniforms is almost unlimited. The only thing that is "chiseled in stone" is that you will be completely sterile. No dog tags, no ID Cards, No Jump Wings, No Patches, No Name Tags and/or Nickname Tags, etc. At this time in the war, there have been enough US uniforms and weapons lost, captured, sold on the black market, etc., that just because you have one of those items, the State Department can still have plausible deniability. Most of you will not immediately be assigned as a 1-0. The vast majority will go to an existing team as a 1-1 or 1-2. The other team members will be full of advice about uniforms and weapons and other gear. Almost everyone has their own personal preference, but many prefer the standard US jungle fatigue uniform. It has lots of pockets, it dries quickly and is pretty rugged and is readily available. All the FOB's have a sew-shop, and almost everyone will have their field uniforms modified with extra pockets, compartments, and appendages. Again, the 1-0 will have plenty of advice on what you add and how to utilize it. The boots of choice are the standard US issue Jungle Boot with the nylon tops. They're light, rugged, provide good ankle support and most of all they dry quickly.

Keeping your feet and your other body parts as dry as possible will be a top priority. It's a highly debated issue, but many of the experienced team members chose to not wear underwear or socks in the field. It rains a lot in the A/O's and most team members don't carry any type of rain gear, so you're going to get wet. You are going to spend days in wet clothes, whether it be from rain or sweat, combined with accumulated dirt, grime, etc., and you will be prone to develop a rash. The standard issue underwear has a tendency to bunch up and exacerbate the rash and in that hot, humid, dirty environment, pretty soon you have a good case of the classic "crotch rot". It can get extremely uncomfortable and you will likely fight it for the rest of your life. Continually wet feet can be a tremendous problem. The skin begins to get the "prune" appearance, and continued walking, running, etc. causes the skin to begin to flake off and develop into areas of raw tissue. Again, in that environment, infection is rampant. Many of the "old hands" go without socks, because they retain the moisture, both sweat and rain, and increase the chance of "trench foot". Sure you can wear socks, and many team members do. You just have to be continually aware of your feet and change socks as often as possible. Also, you can't decide the day before the mission to not wear socks. You have to condition your feet, by going without socks all the time in camp and when training. It will take a few weeks to get them really tough and develop callouses in the right spots. Once you have your feet conditioned and you're wearing the jungle boots with the air vents and nylon tops, you will have a much lower chance of developing foot problems. But, whatever you decide to do, be aware of these potential problem areas and take the necessary precautions to prevent injuries and/or infections.

When you start putting your gear together, you start from the inside out. Once you've decided on the basic uniform, you build from there. What you carry in or on your basic uniform is your absolute last line

of survival. It means you've ditched your rucksack and web gear and all you have left is what you have in your pockets. The first thing in your fatigue pocket is the URC-10 Emergency Radio. This is your last line of communication. It puts out an emergency signal on the guard frequency that is monitored by all aircraft. The next thing is a compass on a piece of suspension line around your neck. In one of your breast pockets is your operational map and your mission KAC code sheet. The operational map only covers your current A/O (usually 16 to 20 grid squares). It is covered with acetate so you can annotate it with grease pencil. Again, it only covers your current A/O — it's a need to know situation. If you have no idea if there is anything going on in the grid squares around your A/O, you can't compromise anything or another team, no matter how much they beat you. The KAC code sheet is a 5X5 matrix of colors and numbers with each square a predetermined response. Each team has a unique KAC for a mission and covey has a copy of each individual team's KAC. An example would be once a team is on the ground, within 10 minutes the 1-0 will call covey with a Black 23. On their KAC sheet that's a "Team OK!" These KAC sheets change with each team and each mission. After mid-1968, and the introduction of RDF along the "Trail" minimum time on the radio was essential to avoid team detection. Also there was an "emergency KAC code", that was a minimal code committed to memory by the 1-0 and covey. This was used in absolute last ditch comms and used with the emergency authentication code. That code was committed to memory and only known to the 1-0, the S-3 Briefing Officer, and Covey. If you make a mistake on the authentication code, the next thing you will see is a 2.75 WP rocket marking your spot followed by a 250 lb. bomb, or a napalm canister, or 20mm cannon fire! So make sure you remember the emergency authentication code — it is for MEMORY ONLY — DO NOT WRITE IT DOWN!!

In one of your other pockets is your emergency medical kit. That contains morphine, compress bandage, cravat (tourniquet), marching pills (amphetamines), surgical thread and needles, and water purification pills. Again, these are last ditch emergency supplies — you have dropped or lost everything else and severely injured and this is what will get you the last few hundred meters to the LZ. In my right breast pocket I had a pen flare. On a piece of suspension line tied to a belt loop was a Swiss Army knife or a standard demo knife in the right trouser pocket.

In the two big pockets on the pants you put one indig ration in each pocket. The indig ration was a bag of dehydrated rice with some vegetables and some type of protein (squid, or shrimp, or mystery meat). You put water in the bag and put it in your pocket to "cook" with your body heat for a few hours. You always have two bags cooking. Once you use one, you put another one in the pocket to replace it. The normal situation was to carry one bag per day of anticipated mission, (Very Important: always have a bottle of Tabasco Sauce — this stuff is totally inedible without Tabasco Sauce) YOU NEVER COOK IN THE FIELD! The only reason you carry this food is because you have to have some type of food to maintain your energy. You are not on a family outing or picnic, this is not food to enjoy or savor — it's only function is to provide you the necessary energy to accomplish your mission. A team's most vulnerable position is when it's taking a chow break. For some reason, humans get so complacent and/or distracted when eating, they have a total tendency to ignore their surrounding situations. NEVER relax during a chow break! NEVER

let more than half of the team eat at a time — the other half MUST be on full alert. The last thing you must have after you have dropped everything else is some water. You can survive several days without food, but only hours without water. You have some purification pills in your emergency medical kit, so even if you have to skim the scum of the top of a pond, it can sustain you and maintain your energy level to continue your evasion and escape effort. The next thing is a signal mirror. You put it on a loop of suspension line through a button hole on your shirt, and carry it in one of your breast pockets. And finally, if you wear a hat, we recommend a "stingy brim" hat (the FOB sew shop will know how to do it). Line the top of the hat, with a piece of "Air Force Emergency Panel". If you prefer to wear something other than a hat, i.e., cravat, or whatever, carry an emergency signal panel in one of the big pockets of the pants.

Once you've got your fatigues loaded, the next level is your web gear. A lot of the RT members really liked and preferred the BAR Belt (WWII Browning Automatic Rifle). Each pocket on the BAR Belt would hold 5 CAR 15 magazines, plus it had open space for grenades, canteens/water bottles, grenades, etc. It was a great piece of equipment, but because of being WWII vintage, the availability was quite limited. (When I was in the Hatchet Force I had a BAR Belt, but when I was moved to an RT, I left it with my replacement platoon leader and opted for traditional web gear with canteen covers for ammo pouches) Even though BAR Belts were preferred, the traditional web gear is the norm for most RT's. The most common ammo pouch is the traditional canteen cover. You can put 7 CAR 15 magazines in each one. You can put 5 magazines vertical and 2 two laying on their side on top of the 5. On the standard web gear you can easily put 4 canteen covers (4 X 7 = 28 mags X 18 = 504 rounds + 1 mag in the rifle = 522 rounds). We put 18 rounds per magazine because you didn't want to overstress the magazine spring. If the spring gets weak, it causes a misfeed and a potential jam. The magazines are loaded facing down, bullets out, so rain and debris can drain out, and we put tape on the bottom of the magazines so we have a tab to pull them out easily. When you come back from a mission and get a 2 or 3 day stand down, get the entire team together and spend 1 or 2 hours, unloading all the magazines, cleaning the rounds, cleaning the magazines, cleaning and oiling the springs. It's only a couple of hours, but it can mean the difference between life and death on the next mission. You are only one misfeed from disaster.

Next on the belt is water: one standard canteen on each side. As stated before, you can survive days without food, but hours without water. On the right side, I carried a canteen cover with M26 hand grenades. On the left side I carried a canteen cover with 2 WP grenades. That left one space, and I carried a canteen cover with the standard medical/first aid supplies.

On the left shoulder strap I taped a strobe light (the cover was colored blue with magic marker). Underneath that I had a yellow smoke grenade.

On the right side I had a 6" Buck Folding Knife, and underneath that a WP Smoke Grenade.

Now that we're finished with the web gear, we're at about 40 lbs. of gear, but now we get to the rucksack. One of the first decisions to be made is who carries the radio. Some 1-0's prefer to carry the radio so they can communicate directly rather than relaying through another

team member. Others prefer to have the 1-1 or 1-2 carry the radio. They feel that while the radio operator is occupied with the communication, it allows the 1-0 to concentrate on the immediate situation and directing the team. It all comes down to what is most comfortable for each 1-0. If you are the one who will carry the radio, it's the first thing that goes in your rucksack. The PRC-25 weighs about 25 lbs., and takes up quite a bit of room so you will be somewhat limited in what else you can carry.

Your assigned mission will have influence on what equipment you take. Once the equipment list has been done and distributed within the team, then you can load your personal gear. Mission essential items are the first to go in. Extra magazines, claymore mines with the firing device and connecting wire, toe popper mines, a collapsible canteen, C-4 (if needed), pre-cut time fuses for the claymore mines and/or C-4, a few extra frag and smoke grenades and extra batteries for the PRC-25 and URC-10, a box of blasting caps and the PEN EE camera. The only creature comfort items I carried was an indig poncho and a long sleeve sweater. The indig poncho was only about 2/3 the size of the standard army poncho, it was light weight nylon and made very little noise. When you're wet, which was most of the time, it gets very cold in the mountains in the wee hours of the morning and the sweater helps make those long nights bearable. These were folded and put in a pocket on the rucksack that provides some cushioning between your back and the radio. The last thing that goes in is food and a C-Ration packet of toilet paper. I carried the indig rations, 2 in my fatigues, and 2 in the rucksack. That would last 4 or 5 days. I had rather risk being hungry, than running out of ammo or not having a back-up battery for the radio. On the outside of the rucksack I carried a Swiss seat rope on one side and an indig machete on the other. At the top of the rucksack where the straps attach to the "bag" I had a snap link attached. This was to be used if we had to come out on McGuire rigs or strings.

DO NOT take heat tabs or cigarettes to the field. NEVER cook or smoke in the field. If you have heat tabs in your rucksack, it's a tremendous temptation to make a cup of coffee on those long, cold nights. If you don't have them, there's no temptation. American cigarettes have a unique odor and carry a long way in the jungle. Again, if you smoke and you have them, it's a tremendous temptation and if you smoke in the field, dying of lung cancer will be the least of your worries.

Once you are loaded out, the fatigues, web gear, and rucksack you will be carrying about 70 lbs. of gear, etc. What you carry will evolve as you get more experience and re-evaluate what works best for you.

The next thing is your weapon. The weapon of choice is the CAR 15. It is very versatile, has good knockdown power, and you can carry lots of ammunition. SOG has access to various weapons, i.e., the Swedish K, the British Sten, the old WWII Grease Gun, AK 47, the M-79 Grenade Launcher, and the silenced 22 Cal. Pistol, just to name a few. During your time here you will do familiarization firing of these various weapons. The all have pros and cons, and it's really up to you and your team leader as to what you carry. Sometimes the mission will influence the choice of weapon for some members of the team. Whatever weapon you select, make sure you are thoroughly knowledgeable of its operation and maintenance. Many 1-0's and team members opt to carry a modified (sawed off) M-79 Grenade

Launcher in addition to their primary weapon. The stock is sawed off and modified into a pistol type grip. Two or three of these on a team can add a lot of firepower and shock effect.

The next subject area was team organization and training. Again, there are no concrete rules on team organization other than the 1-0 is the BOSS. His word is law. Up until a short time ago, all 1-0's had at least 5 missions as a 1-1, most had close to 10, and a recommendation from his former 1-0 to be assigned as a 1-0. Experience, not rank was the primary qualification factor. When I joined an RT as a 1-1, I was a 1LT, my 1-0 was a SSG, but as long as I was a member of that team he was in charge until he rotated and recommended that I be moved up, otherwise I would have remained the 1-1. As a result of heavy losses and increased operational requirements, we don't have that luxury any longer. Many of the 1-0's today only had the opportunity of 2 or 3 missions before being moved into the 1-0 position. But even so, he is still in charge. He may ask your opinion or input during training and mission prep, but on the ground in a firefight is no place for a tactical discussion.

The 1-0 will organize the team, set up the order of march, and assign specific duties. The organization of the team will be a reflection of the 1-0's experience. Unless the mission dictates differently, most prefer a six man team. Under normal circumstances of altitude and lift capability, the entire six man team can be inserted and extracted on one chopper. Usually, the point man will be the most experienced indig team member. Obviously he will be first in order of march. Some 1-0's prefer to be next in line with the M-79 man third for increased firepower during an initial contact. Fourth in line will be another indig, next will be the 1-1, followed by the tail gunner, the second most experienced indig team member. Because of the importance of the tail gunner in covering the back trail, some 1-0's prefer to have the 1-1 as tail gunner. Most teams will have 6 to 8 indig members which allows for sickness, injuries, etc.. All members continually train together which allows substitution without degrading the expertise level of the team. The indigenous personnel who work for SOG are not part of the VN military. They are Yards (Montagnards), Nungs (Chinese), and/or Cambodians (KKK), and basically are mercenaries who work strictly for SOG and are very well paid compared to the VN military. They come from tribes of highly respected traditional warriors and are fiercely loyal to the Americans.

The 1-0 will organize and supervise the team training. If you are not on a mission, you are training. If there is such a thing as the "magic bullet" in recon, it is continuous and intense training and flawless execution. You will constantly be practicing IA Drills (Immediate Action Drills), both dry run and live fire. These are primarily actions taken immediately upon contact. Over time, numerous IA Drills have been developed from the experience of literally hundreds of contacts, and what has proven to provide the team with the best chance of surviving the encounter. During this course you will go through some of the major and/or standard IA Drills, e.g., Frontal Contact, Flank Contact, Rear Contact, and LZ Contact. Each of you will rotate performing the duties of each team member. We will spend more time on this phase than any other part of the course, because it is so vital to the survival of the team. The first 10 to 15 seconds of the contact will have a tremendous impact on the final outcome of the firefight. Every member of the team must know exactly what to do instantly

and execute his duties immediately and exactly. The only way you achieve that level of performance is practice, practice, practice, and when you have it down to absolute perfection, practice some more! All the FOB's have firing ranges and training where teams can do live fire IA Drills. Again it is essential that every member of the team participate in the training and is totally proficient in the drills.

In addition to contact drills, there will be drills for actions on the insertion LZ and the extraction LZ. The same as the contact IA Drills, every team member must know his responsibilities both going in and coming out. Coming out of a hot LZ can be a harrowing experience, especially when you have the enemy only a few meters behind you and/or surrounding the LZ. Whether it be the Vietnamese Kingbees or the American Hueys, those crews are fearless and dedicated to getting you out. Needless to say, when the LZ is full of hostile gunfire, everyone's nerves are on edge. Again, our operation is unique and when a door gunner sees a guy in a NVA uniform carrying an AK come busting out of the tree line running toward his helicopter, he's very likely to open up on him. Some of the teams have the point man in NVA uniform and carrying AK's, and in fact we did have a team member shot by a jumpy door gunner. Fortunately the team member survived and a resourceful 1-0 came up with an effective technique. The team would carry two or three colored bandannas in their pockets, and if the LZ might be hot just before choppers arrived the 1-0 will tell covey "team color is yellow", and each team member would tie a yellow bandanna around their head or neck. That way, anybody without a yellow bandanna on the LZ is fair game. It's not a mandatory technique, but it's something to consider. Two or three bandannas in your pocket don't weigh much and it works. As the 1-0, it's your call.

Another extraction technique that is pretty unique to SOG is coming out on strings, i.e., McGuire rigs or just on the end of a 150 ft. climbing rope with a Swiss seat. During this course, you will ride a McGuire rig and do a string extraction. I had a very personal experience with a McGuire rig extraction and I assure you the time to start learning how to ride a McGuire rig is not when it comes crashing through the trees.

Another area of importance will be directing air strikes. In the Prairie Fire A/O you will have air support from the Air Force with fast movers (jets) and A1-E's from Thailand. You will communicate with the Covey rider and he and the Covey pilot will communicate with the attack aircraft. The jets will have 20mm cannons, 500 lb. bombs, and napalm canisters. Unfortunately the jets consume fuel enormously and usually can only stay on station for about 15 minutes. The A1-E's can stay on station for about an hour, with 50 cal wing guns and 8 250 lb. bombs and 2 napalm canisters. In addition to being able to stay on station, they move slow and can accurately put their ordnance within 50 meters of your position. Unfortunately in the Daniel Boone A/O you won't have the luxury of air strikes, you will only have helicopter gunship support. During the course we won't have jets or A1-E's, but we will have a two FAC (Forward Air Controller) aircraft, one being the Covey with one of the instructors serving as Covey rider. FAC 1 will fire WP rockets to mark your "target" based on your directions (azimuth and distance) and FAC 2 will roll in and fire HP rockets on the "smoke". You will be evaluated and critiqued on your ability to accurately direct the "air strike". Once you are "on the ground" your team's survival could very well depend on your ability to accurately

direct the air strikes. Long Thanh didn't have any assigned air assets, so I had to find some way to acquire the necessary support to be able to do the air strike training.

Last, but not all least, there will be plenty of physical condition training. It will include road marches with 60 lb. rucksacks, running and some variation of the Army Daily Dozen. This is not just something to do to take up time on the training schedule. There will come a time when your survival will depend on you being able to out run, out walk, or out endure the enemy chasing you.

That pretty much covered the major training areas we could cover in the time allotted. There were two areas we were not going to spend much time on: (1) was map reading and land navigation; and (2) was artillery and mortar adjustment. Every student was a graduate of the SF Q-Course which had extensive instruction on map reading and land navigation. If you are not proficient now, we don't have time to teach you. You will be evaluated and critiqued during our exercises and training here, but that is a skill you should have by now. Also, calling for and adjusting artillery and mortar fire is another skill you should already have. In our area of operations, artillery and mortar support is all but non-existent, therefore we are not going to spend time on it.

With the basic subject matter pretty well set, we started working on how we were going to get it done. All of us that were there as the cadre had gotten our training from our team leaders. Also one of the major learning methods was when a 1-0 came back from a mission and had encountered something new, everyone would gather around in the club as he would recount what the enemy had thrown at him and how he had been able to counter it. It would be an open discussion with questions and suggestions (what if's) from the other 1-0's to begin the formulation of possible responses and/or prevention measures for the enemy's new tactics and techniques. It was informal but very intense and effective. It was a system we all knew and were comfortable with. I decided we would use somewhat of a modified version of that system. The classes would be small, between 20 to 24 students. There would be a primary instructor assigned for that segment and the other instructors that were not otherwise engaged in preparation or support would be in the classroom. The primary instructor would start with a presentation on the subject matter, then it would be an open question and answer session with all the other 1-0's and/or 1-1's providing insights and answers to the "what if" situations from the students. We all felt this would be close to the "around the table in the club" sessions and the students will feel they are getting the real information "straight from the horses' mouth."

In addition to the classroom sessions, there would be a significant amount of field work, i.e., IA Drills, both dry run and live fire, range firing, demolitions training, air strikes, etc.

As mentioned earlier, Long Thanh was a large camp with extensive training areas and facilities to support the many projects within the camp. It had a very substantial firing range with sufficient area for live fire IA Drills as well as a demo range. One of the major cover stories for the camp was conducting a Vietnamese Jump School, so it had an area for airborne training and a drop zone. (In fact the Vietnamese cadre did conduct 2 or 3 airborne cycles per year just to keep up the cover story). It had very adequate classrooms and a training aid

production shop. All in all, it was a very adequate location for the 1-0 School. We, the cadre, spent the next two weeks preparing lesson outlines, scheduling ranges and training areas, fine tuning the training schedule and getting acclimated to the camp and camp personnel.

As I outlined earlier, Long Thanh was an OP 34 camp and we were all OP 35 people. Because of the strict compartmentalization within SOG very few knew what the other sections did, so at first it was somewhat of an uneasy relationship. We were all Special Forces and as the instructors arrived, some of them knew some of the camp personnel from prior assignments in other Groups. During the first couple of weeks over a few drinks in the club we all began to feel more comfortable with each other. By the time the first group of students arrived, we had established a good working relationship between the camp and the 1-0 School.

The students arrived on a Sunday afternoon. Once we got them settled into the barracks, we gathered them in a class room and gave them the orientation briefing. We explained this camp had several other missions in addition to supporting this school. Just like our missions, theirs are classified as well, so respect the restricted areas and don't be asking questions regarding the other projects. We explained this is going to be different from any school they have been to before. This is

not an academic exercise; there will be no written exams. Everything is going to be hands-on. Whether you pass or fail will depend on your team instructor/team leader. For the "final exam" he will take you on a real target. Only if he feels you are a competent team member will you successfully complete this course. You will not receive a Certificate. This is not a sanctioned school, it will not be recorded in your personnel file. You will get a Zippo lighter with the SOG Crest, a firm hand shake and a ride to the airfield to catch the next Blackbird back to your FOB. The training schedule runs 7 days a week. There are no "off days". We only have 3 weeks to teach you a tremendous amount of information. Our goal is to teach you the essential survival skills for what will likely be the most difficult assignment of your career. We will start early with PT and some days will extend into the night. After a question and answer period, we took them on an orientation tour of the camp pointing out the mess hall, dispensary, club, showers, etc. We finished with rules and etiquette of the club and cautioned not to stay too late – we will be starting early tomorrow. ❖

Next up in the October Sentinel:

From the Archive— MACV-SOG One Zero School, Part III in the Series: Class One Implementation Part III

The image shows three copies of the book 'Nobody is Coming to Save You' by Lt. Col. Scott Mann (Ret.). The cover is dark grey with white and yellow text. The title 'NOBODY IS COMING TO SAVE YOU' is in large, bold, white letters. Below the title, it says 'A GREEN BERET'S GUIDE TO GETTING BIG SH*T DONE' in yellow. At the bottom, the author's name 'LT. COL. SCOTT MANN (RET.)' is written in white, with 'NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR' in smaller white text below it. The background of the book covers is a solid yellow color.

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Book Review

Eric Blehm's *Legend*: A Must-Read SOG/Aviation Story



John Stryker Meyer

By John Stryker Meyer

Originally published in the July 2015 *Sentinel*

Special Forces Senior Medic Lee Martin vividly remembers the first time he saw Green Beret Raul Perez "Roy" Benavidez on May 2, 1968.

Benavidez's bloody, muddy, beaten body was inside a body bag, which was laying on the airstrip at the Loc Ninh Special Forces A Camp A-331 (located near

the Cambodian border), waiting to be shipped to the morgue. His body bag was lying alongside the bodies of several American aviators and Green Berets, and a few enemy soldiers who were killed that day during a top-secret mission in Cambodia that turned deadly.

"I'll never forget it," Martin told SOFREP. "He was just a mess. There was no doubt in my mind that he was dead, based on his appearance: the dried blood, sweat, mud, and soft body tissues on his face."

Martin watched as a doctor bent down and gave one final inspection of the Green Beret sergeant. Much to his surprise, Benavidez's lips moved as he spit at the doctor, incapable of speaking or moaning. "His face was so caked over he couldn't open his eyes," Martin recalled. Also, the doctor couldn't see that Benavidez's arms crossed over a gaping abdominal wound that he suffered at the hands of a communist North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier.

Author Eric Blehm brilliantly captures that surreal moment in Green Beret history on page one of his recently penned non-fiction masterpiece, "Legend."

Blehm skillfully crafts a story that takes readers into Benavidez's history, from his early days as a migrant worker with a hair-trigger temper in El Campo, Texas, to the foundational moment in his life when he dedicates himself to honor, duty, and country.

He also covers the surprising 10-year effort that it took for Sergeant Benavidez to be recommended for the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for valor. President Ronald Reagan draped it around his neck on February 24, 1981—13 years after Benavidez's heroic efforts in Cambodia.

Additionally, for readers who want to know more about the top secret war conducted during the Vietnam War under the aegis of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam—Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), Blehm frames Benavidez's day in Cambodian hell by expertly explaining the need for a secret war and the motivations behind the men who fought in it, providing an accurate frame of reference that enhances the understanding of Benavidez's core values: Family members had told Benavidez to help those who needed help.

These factors lead him to jump on a helicopter returning to a deadly landing zone in Cambodia to simply help his fellow Green Berets, their indigenous troops, and the fearless aviators who regularly put their lives on the line every day flying in support of SOG missions by traveling across the fence into enemy-held territory. When Benavidez jumped onto that helicopter, he was carrying a medic's kit and a knife. No gun.

After two years spent researching and interviewing, Blehm presents the readers with insightful details into the 12-man recon team that went on the secret mission into Cambodia to find and capture Russian equipment. You'll read about Leroy Wright, the team leader; Lloyd Mousseau, the assistant team leader; and Brian O'Connor, the Green Beret radioman on the team.

Blehm also breathes life into the key indigenous personnel on the team: Tuan, the interpreter; Bao, the fearless point man; and Chien, the grenadier. Readers will learn that Tuan had attended a university before joining the ranks of SOG indigenous personnel. A Saigon native, Tuan was well-read and a staunch anti-communist. However, he was also a critic of the corruption within South Vietnam's government.

Blehm pays tribute to the indigenous troops on the Project Sigma recon team who fought heroically beside their Green Beret counterparts. He details their courage under fire by a huge, numerically superior North Vietnamese Army force.

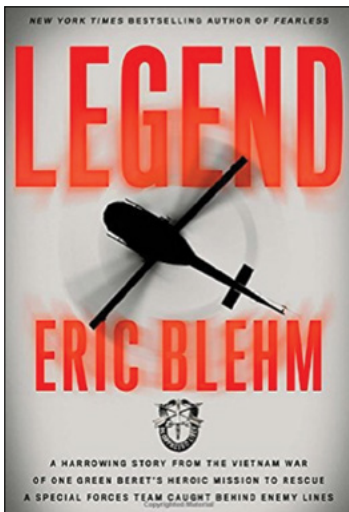
Blehm doesn't stop there.

This California native son, who has written two previous books on Special Operations troops, one on a Green Beret A-Team in Afghanistan and one on Navy SEAL Team Six, brings to life the airmen who served so valiantly in support of SOG missions throughout the war.

In this instance, the men of the 240th Assault Helicopter Company were the lead support helicopter element for that fateful mission into Cambodia, lead by Major Jesse James. Blehm points out the harsh political realities

of American soldiers and aircrews having to cope with an enemy force supplied by Russia, China, and other Eastern Bloc nations, training and hiding with impunity in Cambodia.

All parties involved in battle that day had signed a treaty agreeing not to send armed troops into Cambodia or Laos. The U.S. State Department knew the communist troops were there but didn't expose them publicly while they made sure that no U.S. troops entered Cambodia, other than the men of SOG and the aircrews assigned to that mission. The men of the 240th AHC, the Greyhound slicks, and Mad Dog gunships flew into the teeth of a heavily armed and entrenched NVA force.



Eric Blehm, author of *Legend*.

Here, Blehm puts his honed writing skills into high gear, as he lays out minute, painful details of the fight, complete with three extremely helpful maps. For any veteran whose been pinned down by enemy gunfire, reading this battle account will have you feeling chills up your spine; it evokes memories of battles past. But few battles could be as severe as the hornet's nest that the Project Sigma team entered that day.

As I read the book, I got to know the men involved on both sides of the mission, thanks to the research and interviews Blehm garnered. I couldn't put the book down until I turned to page 276 and read the research and acknowledgments that Blehm outlined.

This is a must-read for any SOG/aviation combat reader or aficionado. "Legend" is available in eBook, hardcover, paperback, and audiobook formats. ❖

About the author

Eric Blehm is the author of the New York Times bestsellers "Fearless" and "The Only Thing Worth Dying For." His first book, "The Last Season," was the winner of the National Outdoor Book Award, and was deemed by Outside magazine to be one of the "greatest adventure biographies ever written." He lives in southern California with his wife and children.

Book Review

Murphy's Law: My Journey from Army Ranger and Green Beret to Investigative Journalist by Jack Murphy



Kenn Miller

Reviewed by Kenn Miller

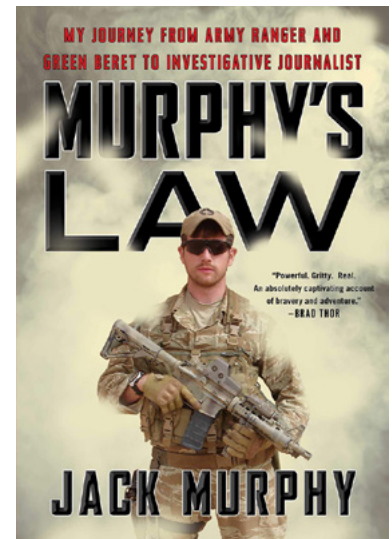
Originally published in the December 2020 *Sentinel*

A year or so ago, when the infamous John Stryker Meyer was president of SFA Chapter 78, among the guest speakers to come to a chapter meeting was Jack Murphy, an eight year special operations veteran of the U.S. Army's 3rd Ranger Battalion and 5th Special Forces Group. Jack Murphy was one of our most popular speakers, but it was his young daughter, patiently enduring her father's talk to the other old men while waiting for a promised trip to Sea World who really won our hearts.

After eight years in the U.S. Army—all of which seems to have been in the Ranger Regiment and in Special Forces, and is well covered in this book — Jack Murphy realized that about all the Army held for him was a comparatively dull life as a senior NCO, passing time until retirement, so he left the Army and finally went to college and earned some impressive scholarly credentials from Columbia University.

With a United States Army Special Operations education, and Ivy League academic credentials—Jack Murphy set off on a career as an investigative journalist. He was apparently aware that such a career might earn a man both friends and enemies.

And while the strictly military parts of the book are interesting and well told, the post-military part of *MURPHY'S LAW* just might be the most interesting (and somewhat shocking) part of this very readable and informative book.



Murphy's Law: My Journey from Army Ranger and Green Beret to Investigative Journalist

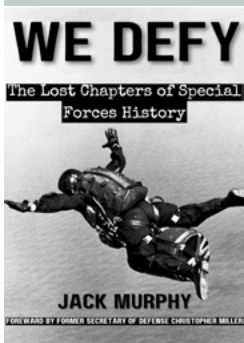
by Jack Murphy

Threshold Editions, An Imprint of Simon & Schuster

ISBN 978-1-5011-9125-1

271 pages

Jack Murphy's new book—*We Defy: The Lost Chapters of Special Forces History*



Reserve your copy!

The official release date December 9, 2024.

Pre-orders can be made at [Amazon](#).

As a journalist, Murphy goes back to some of the places he knew from previous combat deployments, and that is good exciting reporting about a less than peaceful and perfect part of the world. That's not a surprise, and not much of a shocker. It is also no surprise to discover that like every other large institution, the U.S. military also has its share of scandal and corruption. Murphy tells of sexual and power corruption, and abuses that have been uncovered, and he does so knowing that telling the truth can make a man a lot of enemies.

Jack Murphy may well become the "Robert Woodward" of military investigative journalism, and we need such journalism. It takes a lot of courage to serve as an Army Ranger, a Green Beret, and as an honest investigative journalist. Jack Murphy has shown this courage, and I look forward to reading everything he writes.

Buy *MURPHY'S LAW*, read *MURPHY'S LAW*, and tell your friends about it. And keep your eyes open, because Jack Murphy still has a lot more to write about.

Read an excerpt from *Murphy's Law*, "The Wedding Crashers," on page 11.❖

The Wedding Crashers



Jack Murphy

By Jack Murphy

Excerpted from *Murphy's Law: My Journey from Army Ranger and Green Beret to Investigative Journalist*, published by Threshold Editions, (April 23, 2019), pages 109–122

I arrived at 5th Special Forces group in 2007. I got assigned to 4th Battalion. After 9/11, Donald Rumsfeld had issued a directive that Special Forces was to rapidly expand. The Pentagon, Special Forces Command, and General Parker

at the Special Warfare complied with this policy decision but in the process ended up violating what are known as the Special Operations Forces (SOF) Truths, which are as follows:

- Humans are more important than Hardware.
- Quality is better than Quantity.
- Special Operations Forces cannot be mass produced.
- Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.
- Most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance.

As I had begun to see in the Q-Course, then more so as a member of Special Forces, we were violating all of these so-called truths and continue to do so to this day. We mass produce young soldiers for

these units while turning a blind eye to the massive retention issues. No one wants to ask why hardly anyone stays in these units.

I tried to get out of the 4th Battalion assignment because it was a brand-new battalion that we had to stand up from scratch, so we would not be deploying any time soon. I was unsuccessful in this endeavor. When I showed up, the Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) teams were filling up with sergeants, but we had no equipment and few officers. We didn't have team rooms and hung out in 5th Group's isolation facility. Our first battalion commander got into trouble and was allowed to quietly retire. He allegedly had classified information on his personal computer and his wife dined him out to Army investigators during the course of a messy divorce. These types of incidents are rarely reported in the press but they happen just about every day.

I had expected to be the youngest, most inexperienced Green Beret on an ODA filled with salty old sergeants. It turned out that I was one of the more experienced guys and was immediately made the senior weapons sergeant on my team. It was kind of a frustrating mess. In time, weapons and gear floated in, and we began training on Fort Campbell. We all tried to make the best of it.

One advantage of standing up a new battalion is that there is no shortage of training to attend. Personally, I enjoyed combat training and liked learning new things and mastering new skills. It was



ODA 5414 team picture in Tal Afar Iraq, 2009 (Photo courtesy Jack Murphy)

head and shoulders above garrison life, which was mostly about getting down on your kneepads for the officer class and endless online training modules that are done simply to “check the block” on some spreadsheet that shows you are “T” for trained in some useless administrative task.

I went to the Military Free Fall course, which, of all the classes I attended in the army, was the most fun. We also got to do off-road driving at AM General, urban driving at Gryphon Group, which is a training program run by a private company in Florida, live-tissue medical training, shooting courses at Mid-South, which is a privately run marksmanship school, the Glock armorers’ course, the SOF armorers’ course, and more.

More than once during this period of time, I packed two bags, taking one to a course and leaving the other at my apartment in Clarksville. I would return home from one course, drop my bag, pick up the one I had left behind, and go right back out the door to the next course.

It wasn’t all fun and games, though. At the SOP armorers’ course in Indiana I went out for dinner with my junior weapons sergeant. I probably had seven glasses of Johnnie Walker Black Label; I don’t remember what my junior was drinking. A third student drove us back to our hotel, and my junior decided that it was time for me to go to bed. I said, “Yeah, sure, but I need to brush my teeth.” I got up and headed to the sink. My junior was not having it; he had decided that I needed to go to bed right goddamn now! He tackled me from behind, and we both went flying into a corner, wrecking a lamp and a trash can. As we fought each other, he decided to bite down on my shoulder with his teeth. “Ow, you goddamn asshole, what the fuck is wrong with you!” Convinced that I would now go to bed, my junior finally knocked it off and went to his room.

Normally, I would have just shrugged something like that off, but get this: We were done with the course and heading back to Clarksville

the next day. My girlfriend was flying in to meet me, and guess who now had a huge bite mark on his shoulder? You could see individual teeth marks, for Christ’s sake! Yeah, good fucking luck explaining that to your girlfriend: *Oh, yeah, honey, that was my battle buddy. He had a few too many, tackled me into the corner of a hotel room, and bit me.* I wouldn’t believe that shit if someone told me. But by the grace of God, she never noticed the bite mark. This is where being Irish pays off, as it must have blended in with the freckles on my shoulder.

Back at the home station, we got team rooms, and our gear was filtering in, but most important, we got a deployment schedule. We had some great guys on my ODA, but overall, I found 5th Group to be insanely bureaucratic and very conventional in how they did things. The nickname “5th Ranger Battalion” often gets applied to 5th Special Forces Group. It was a sharp contrast from Ranger Battalion, where we had our own compound and did things our own way; 5th Group seemed shackled by Mother Army. Officers and senior NCOs treated it like a conventional unit despite its being organized and equipped for unconventional warfare. This resulted in suboptimal performance, to say the least.

We were also bombarded with asinine online training modules. The modern army has gone completely corporate. Strong leadership has been replaced by statistical analysis and measuring metrics. The sole purpose of soldiers is to provide warm bodies so that officers can claim they command a unit. Their task from day to day is not preparing for war but filling trackers. Soldiers need to be “green” on their tasks at all times. That isn’t to say that they need to be technically and tactically proficient; no one cares about that, no one measures that. What is most important is that they have an up-to-date medical profile, their sexual harassment training, their quarterly information security training, their online SERE refresher (where they run around in a bullshit video game, rubbing sticks together to make a fire), and a hundred other completely worthless requirements



The ODA and a few attachments doing a Military Free Fall train up prior to our deployment to Iraq. (Photo courtesy Jack Murphy)



The author, manning the .50 Ma Deuce as we head out on a patrol in N. Iraq (Photo courtesy Jack Murphy)

that do nothing other than help some careerist officer cover his ass. It is a soulless, counterproductive, and cynical approach to leadership that places “qualifications” ahead of readiness.

Dr. Leonard Wong at the U.S. Army War College did a study which found that our soldiers are tasked with so much mandatory training army-wide that leaders don’t have any time to train soldiers on their actual jobs. Furthermore, the army tells us to conduct more mandatory training than there are training days on the calendar. But it gets better, because officers are reporting to higher-ups that yes, they are in fact conducting all mandatory training to standard. This is impossible. Every officer in the U.S. Army is sending up false reports. What the army has done is conditioned entire generations of soldiers to feel that it is okay to compromise their integrity, not once but twice. The first compromise is the criminally negligent act of not preparing their men for combat. The second is lying about it.

Let me explain how this works on a team level. Your team sergeant comes into the team room and lectures you all on how you need to have your trackers up to date and be in the green on all assigned admin tasks. He is saying this because his bosses are holding his feet to the fire. So instead of training, troops are busy sitting behind a computer, mindlessly clicking through an online test module from the bullshit army safety center. No one gives a fuck, and no one gives a

fuck that no one gives a fuck. It is a military culture of not taking pride in your work. You finish your online training, print out a certificate, hand it to your chain of command, they update the tracker, and your team is “trained” up on the whiteboard.

I understand that running a team is about more than what you see in the recruitment commercials. There are logistics and administrative tasks that need to be handled. Guys need to go to the dentist, soldiers need to understand the Geneva Convention, but at some point, this shit has gotten completely out of control. I really can’t begin to explain how dehumanizing and demoralizing the cynical corporate culture is. More so when, on a daily basis, you hear about our troops being killed fighting our war overseas. Some of us joined the army and took this war seriously. We wanted to win. I never gave a fuck about having a “career” and would have been happy to just be a senior weapons sergeant forever. I mean, when you look at your senior NCOs and see that they are emasculated secretaries for some colonel, you have to ask why the hell would you want to get promoted in the first place?

As an ODA, we were now going into our pre-deployment workup in 2007. We did a HALO/HAHO train-up in Las Vegas and then a few weeks of pre-mission training (PMT) at Fort Knox. HALO and HAHO are both forms of military free-fall parachuting. High-altitude

Low-opening is when you jump from an airplane at high altitude, up to thirty thousand feet, and deploy your parachute around four thousand feet. In a high-altitude high-opening jump, you deploy your parachute immediately after exiting the aircraft and glide under canopy for long distances, perhaps even across an international border. These are clandestine infiltration techniques designed to insert Special Forces teams into denied areas.

The parachute riggers were good to go, but most of the group support personnel were about as lethargic as you could possibly imagine, supporting no one but themselves. They seemed to expect a bribe of a bottle of whiskey just to get them out of their chairs. Talk about frustrating. At the end of the day, it is the ODA itself that pulls together, works as a team, and ultimately bends if not breaks the rules in order to complete their mission, out of necessity.

A new team sergeant who came to our team before our HALO train-up asked that I refer to him as Michael Bluth, the name of the main character in *Arrested Development*, which he got me watching on DVD while we were in Iraq. He told us that no one can be trusted outside our team room doors. He wasn't mistaken.

Finally, our deployment date rolled around. Guess where we were heading? My old stomping grounds: Tal Afar.

ODA 5414 deployed to Iraq in the winter of 2009. It was our first operational deployment. We hit the ground at FOB Sykes and conducted a relief in place with the ODA that was on the way out. The outgoing 18B (weapons sergeant) walked me through the situation, taking me to the arms room, the conex containers full of ammo, and then introduced me to the Tal Afar SWAT team.

The Iraqi SWAT team members were living in some old Saddam-era bunkers on the FOB, alternating between two shifts, each consisting of a platoon-sized element. One platoon would be at home while the other was in the bunkers, training and waiting for missions. These guys had been selected and trained by U.S. Special Forces, and frankly, I was just the latest cock on the block to take them under my wing. Inside the bunker, we met the SWAT team leaders, smoked cigarettes, and played get-to-know-you. Iraqis will ask you what your birthday is and be impressed when you tell them the month and day. They usually only know what year they were born, such are the medical records in that part of the world. I met Salem, the SWAT commander, and his right-hand men, Qasim, Faisal, and Shahab. They turned out to be great partners and friends. Unfortunately, the other platoon turned out to be subpar.

My ODA's compound consisted of a series of CHUs, or containerized housing units, set on cinder blocks in long rows; two CHUs could be welded together, and this was the case for our arms room, our loadout room, the operations center (OPCEN), and a couple other structures. The mechanics had a large tent where they could work on vehicles, and we had a small fleet of Humvees and MRAPs and some civilian cars and trucks for driving around the base and to the chow hall. We also had a fire pit, around which many a party was had.

On our initial ride through Tal Afar that deployment, I recognized many sights, even though it was my first time being there in daylight. The city was transformed. Four years prior, you could not set foot



Doing some recon for a training exercise near our FOB. (Photo courtesy Jack Murphy)



Walking around Dohuk, Kurdistan in civilians. (Photo courtesy Jack Murphy)

in Tal Afar without getting into a firefight; now we could walk around the market without body armor and just a pistol on our hip. Finally, a positive counterinsurgency story!

Sure, five years later, the American presence would no longer exist, and the entire city would be taken over by ISIS and its population enslaved by jihadists, but that's another story. Let's bask in our successes for a few moments, shall we?

While we drove down the streets on that initial ride-along, I was up in the gun turret behind the .50-cal. I silently observed several collapsed houses where the roof and individual floors had pancaked on top of one another, concrete left crumbling under the hot Iraqi sun. These were the houses we had called in AC-130 strikes on four years ago. There was no reconstruction for Iraq, and this became even more evident when we began making trips in Mosul.

The enemy situation had changed drastically. By this time AQI had been brought to their knees. The special operations task force had

pushed their shit in, but that's something you won't hear much about in the press. The task force I'd been a part of had in fact helped quell the insurgency, and now there was a great opportunity to consolidate gains, build infrastructure, and enable good governance in Iraq. Sadly, none of this was to happen. Before we left, our commanders had told us that our mission success would be based on how few combat operations we'd done, because now we were to transition authority over to the Iraqis, especially with a new Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) being signed. This opinion changed when we hit the ground, and our chain of command began pushing us to submit CONOPs (concept of the operations) plans for combat missions.

Everyone knew that Obama would have us withdraw from the country. In the end, the administration uprooted the entire infrastructure that had been built in-country, including vast intelligence networks, something that had never been done before. I and many others quickly deduced that this was a bad idea. Yes, the Iraqis needed to step up, and none of us wanted to be their colonial masters, but the reality is that the country wasn't ready. The government did not function and was rife with corruption. However, orders were orders, and during this time, the army put in a diligent effort to make it look like things were good in Iraq.

Commanders on the ground were being actively encouraged to send up false reports to higher, making the situation on the ground look much rosier than it was. A policy decision had been made from up high, and now the foot soldiers in this war had to make reality fit into the bubble that our politicians had created back stateside.

When I mentioned to my team leader that if we left, Iraq would become a terrorist state like Afghanistan in 2001, my captain said, "Well, that is just stating the obvious."

We all knew.

While AQI had been all but put out of business, another enemy was beginning to rear its head. They called themselves the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and were based out of Syria, where we couldn't touch them. The group consisted of former Baath Party members like Al-Douri and Saddam Hussein's daughter, visions of the old regime dancing in front of their eyes like sugarplum fairies. Their primary tactic was to attack only coalition forces in Iraq, rather than alienating the locals, like AQI, which was basically a glorified death cult. The enemy was learning.

So, we came up with a training schedule for the SWAT team, getting them out on the range shooting, running through the shoot house, doing medical classes, and all of that good army training, while we put together targeting packets. Soon the intel that the previous team had developed on a terrorist in Mosul named Abu Gaini began to come together.

If you want to catch a terrorist, you have to locate him first, and the one place where you know he will be is at his own wedding.

By 2009, insurgents and terrorists in Iraq had gotten fairly wily. The enemy had learned from their engagements with U.S. Special Operations Forces, and they were taking increasingly sophisticated measures to try to trip us up and avoid our raids. So, when we found out that a big-name terrorist was getting married, and where the



The two 18B (weapons sergeants) including myself and my junior bravo standing with Iraqi SWAT partners at the castle in the middle of Tal Afar. The castle was later dismantled by ISIS as a part of their ethnic cleansing of the area. (Photo courtesy Jack Murphy)

marriage would be held, a lot of uncertainty was taken out of the equation. This moron *had* to be at his own damn wedding.

Once we had solid intel on the date and location of the wedding, we rolled into Mosul that afternoon in our Humvees, heading toward the target house. One difference between my time with the Ranger regiment and my new job was that, as a Special Forces team, we were always partnered with our Iraqi counterparts, in this case a SWAT team from Tal Afar. With a platoon-sized element of Iraqis, our ODA snaked the vehicles through the flooded back alleys of Mosul.

The city had taken a beating since I was there four years before. Mosul had looked like Beirut back in the eighties, with a number of collapsed buildings and structures covered in bullet pockmarks. Mosul had always been one of the most violent cities in Iraq, and now the enemy was building bigger IEDs to defeat the armor packages that coalition forces had put on vehicles to protect us from the previous IEDs. Like I said, the enemy was learning and adapting.

We navigated our way through the labyrinth of back roads on the north side of the city. The streets were partially flooded with brown water; rocks and pebbles gathered in clusters on the roadsides. Kids looked at us with a mix of curiosity and shock as we slow-rolled past them, searching for the target building.

As silently as possible, we pulled up in front of the objective building and unassed the vehicles. We quietly opened doors and crept down the street in broad daylight.

I was an assault team leader, taking four Iraqi SWAT troops through the front door. We quickly pushed through the open front gate into the inner courtyard. It was all over in a flash, fairly anticlimatic, which is the way it should be. If the enemy has time to react to your raid, then you've lost the element of surprise and, with it, the advantage. Special Forces soldiers like to engage the enemy at a place and time of their choosing, rather than letting the enemy dictate the terms of the fight.

We flooded the compound with assaulters, clearing rooms, sending men scurrying up ladders to the roof, locking down every doorway and potential avenue of escape. The fighting-age men had guns trained on them and were flex-cuffed in short order.

Abu Gaini, the terrorist we were after, was in the courtyard with the other men. The wedding ceremony was complete, and at this point the men would have begun drinking. The dowry (a lethargic goat that sat panting in the courtyard for the duration of our stay on the objective) would have been killed and a meal cooked. Instead, Abu Gaini was put on the ground; a Glock 19 pistol was found tucked into the waistband of his suit.

In the back room, the women were holding court separately. A lone Iraqi SWAT team member stood sentry in the doorway but wasn't interacting with the women in any way. The SWAT guys were scared to death of women, it seemed, but I suppose that was better than the opposite — we never had to deal with them acting inappropriately toward women on target.

The bride broke out in tears as we secured the home, and the Iraqi women began screaming at us. As we soon found out, the bride was only sixteen years old. We left the women alone and didn't put our hands on any of them — we prefer not to, and it is additionally offensive to the culture, so we avoid it.

But it gets better. We'd crashed the wedding at the eleventh hour. Had we delayed any longer — had we gotten lost down one of the side streets, for example — the terrorist would have consummated the marriage. We crashed the wedding just in time to save a teenage girl's virginity from this terrorist asshole. This was how our ODA got the name "The Wedding Crashers."

While one of our ODA members questioned the terrorist, the bad guy said to him through an interpreter that if we knew who he was, then we knew what he had done — killing people and setting off IEDs for cash and for his terrorist cause. "Just put a bullet in my head now," he begged. No dice. Under the recently signed Status of Forces Agreement, he would be sent directly to an Iraqi prison. After flex-cuffing the terrorist, we decided to haul in his old man as well. His father was involved in his son's criminal enterprise on some level, though we weren't sure exactly how.

I grabbed the father under his arm, helped him up, and led him through the gate and out into the street where our vehicles were waiting. Our source sat in one of the Humvees, wearing a scarf around his face. When I led the old man in front of the source, he silently nodded. This was the guy. The old man just laughed; he looked back at me and chuckled. I stood him next to a wall while we prepared to load all of the detainees on our vehicles. Abu Gaini's father was totally nonchalant about the whole affair, as if it were all a joke. I couldn't figure him out.

Back at our base, FOB Sykes in Tal Afar, I sat down in the bunker where our ISWAT team was quartered. We were just sitting around, smoking cigarettes and generally shooting the shit. One of them mentioned to me that the "old man," the terrorist's father, had killed his cousin, who had been a police officer. This piqued my interest, and I asked him what he was talking about.

Back in 2005, Tal Afar had been a straight-up terrorist sanctuary. Recall my previous experiences in Tal Afar, when I was in Ranger Battalion. Back during the bad old days of Tal Afar, which in 2009 was fairly peaceful, the father had been issuing fatwahas on people and was known as an accomplished insurgent sniper. One guy told me that the old man could take the cherry off of a cigarette from a thousand meters away. Surely an exaggeration, but it showed how afraid of him they were. Abu Gaini's father had murdered a lot of people, including policemen, and the citizens of Tal Afar had no sympathy for this guy.

I walked into the back of the bunker where the old man was sitting on the floor under guard by the Iraqi SWAT team members. He was looking around and smiling at everyone with not a care in the world. I asked him some questions through our interpreter about his past activities. I told him that I had heard he was a pretty good sniper. He just laughed and threw up his handcuffed hands. "No, no, mister, you got it all wrong." He was like a serial killer. A psychopath.

We used to visit the prison in Tal Afar every so often to see what was up. The terrorist we'd captured in Mosul was always there, even months later, still wearing his wedding suit. The Iraqi warden kept him handcuffed to the bars of his cell in the standing position so he could never sit down. Don't blame Americans for this sort of mistreatment — we were completely hands-off due to that Status of Forces Agreement I mentioned previously. We would have imprisoned him humanely, but what the Iraqis did to each other was their business. As American soldiers, we could express disagreement to our host nation counterparts, but we had no power to do anything about it.

Sadly, the prison warden was himself killed by an Al-Qaeda suicide bomber who showed up at his front door one night during this same six-month deployment. Took the warden's entire family in the blast, everyone except a second cousin. The cousin felt that the attack had been directed against his family by Shias because they were Sunni. To get revenge, he went into the market with an AK-47 and started gunning down Shias in cold blood until the Iraqi military showed up and wasted him.

This is the insanity that is Iraq.

Now, how about the terrorist's father, the old man? He had murdered too many innocent people in Tal Afar to be allowed to live. I never saw him again after we dropped him off at the prison that first time. I later heard through the grapevine that the Iraqis disappeared him out in the desert somewhere.

In 2009, the situation on the ground in Iraq was getting increasingly convoluted. The amount of bureaucracy you had to go through to get anything done was off the charts. Giving the Iraqis medical training in a classroom on our base required a memo from a colonel; the conventional American troops did not like interacting with my ISWAT team; every colonel in the country had a big idea about how they were going to win the war. One unfortunate statement from our high headquarters was that we needed to get them all the information they needed to win the war. How the hell was a Special Forces staff office going to win a war? We needed their support, but from their perspective, we (the maneuver element) had to support them (the staff element) in their effort to achieve total victory in Iraq. Man, this shit was getting weird. ❖

BEIRUT, Lebanon (1983)

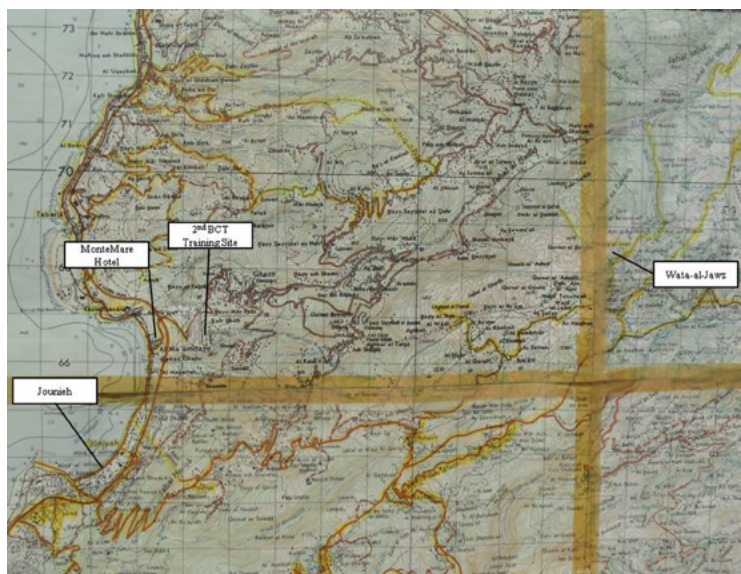
By Jim Wiehe

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ODA 231 / 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Originally published in the July 2021

In the summer of 1983, a mini-war — a sideshow to the larger chaos inside of Lebanon erupted in the Chouf Mountains. The Syrians refused to remove their 30,000 troops stationed inside Lebanon; Israeli deployments depended on the Syrians, the fighting in the Chouf Mountains spilled over onto the streets of the Lebanese capital. The Militias owned street corners, neighborhoods, and competing criminal enterprises that dabbled in everything from smuggled goods to heroin and arms. Ownership of the street corner could change in the muzzle-flash of a close-quarter killing. A checkpoint belonging

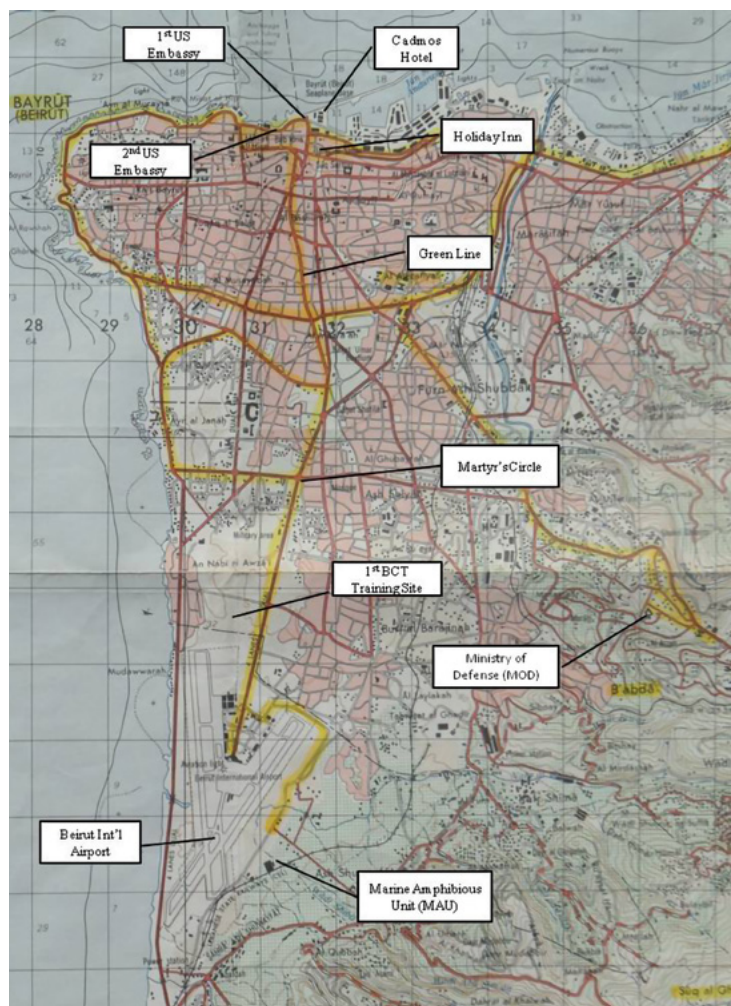


to a Sunni militia in the morning could have a photo of the Ayatollah in front of the sandbags by evening. A militia that was anti-American one day could change its loyalties and suddenly change. A Druze militia, loyal to Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt, augmented security around the British Embassy and provided an invaluable and reliable ring of security surrounding the chancery where the British and American diplomats worked.¹

Checkpoints in Beirut were manned by pill poppers, hashish smokers, and psychopaths. A motorist who answered a question incorrectly, or who belonged to the wrong religion or militia, could be dragged out of his car, and shot point-blank in the head.²

In 1982 the United States proposed a Lebanese Army Modernization Program to be implemented in four phases. The first three phases entailed the organization of seven full-strength, multi-confessional army brigades, created from existing battalions. It was during these early three phases that MTT's from the 10th Special Forces Group (A) were sent to Beirut to perform a Foreign Internal Defense (FID) mission.

1. Fred Burton and Samuel M. Katz. *Beirut Rules, The Murder of a CIA Station Chief and Hezbollah's War Against America*, Penquin Random House, page. 91-92. 2018.
2. Ibid. Page 92.



Beirut City Maps depicting training area locations (click on maps to view larger images). (Courtesy James Wiehe)

10th Special Forces Group (A) in Beirut, Lebanon (1983)

From 11 March 1983 to 25 October 1985, the 10th Special Forces Group deployed seventeen separate Mobile Training Teams (MTT) into Lebanon.³ These teams performed a Foreign Internal Defense mission to advise and assist the Lebanese Army Training Centers. The MTT's and the Lebanese Army developed a training program for over 5,000 officers, NCOs, and Soldiers. The newly trained Officers and NCO's became the nucleus for follow-on MTTs and acted as interpreters and trainers. Training sites at Beirut and Adma provided basic training; Safra was used for unit training; Wata Al Jawz was used for unit combined arms live-fire, and Haef Jumayyid was used for urban live-fire training. Training programs for NCO combat leaders, basic training for over 900 LAF conscripts, long-range reconnaissance training for the Lebanese Rangers and advance unit training and maintenance for Mechanized Units were also conducted.⁴



10th Special Forces Group Deploys MTT's

Over the course of the years, there has been much speculation as to how the 10th Special Forces Group received the Lebanon missions and not the 5th Special Forces Group? As per my conversation with BG Potter, he stated that:

"1/10th Gp and Det A were resident EUCOM assets and their capabilities known by the EUCOM staff and that the Mediterranean to include Lebanon was within the EUCOM area of responsibility.⁵

On March 20, 1983, thus began the 10th Special Forces Group involvement with rebuilding and training the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). CW2 (Ret) Lou Pacelli, one of the original members of MTT #1, explained that:

"Instead of deploying as a Detachment, we were chosen as individuals to be put together as a composite team. We were ordered to report to the Commander's office and asked to volunteer for a classified assignment. We received a warning order to prepare for a mission to the Republic of Lebanon to train and assist them in small unit tactics. I immediately volunteered and was put into isolation at the 10th Group isolation area. The majority of the team was assigned to teach basic infantry tactics, both mounted and dismounted. I was placed in the Basic Training Committee. The Committee consisted of five members. The team was composed of personnel from all three companies in the battalion. Our team consisted of; the Team Sergeant, Master Sergeant Michael "Mick" Roberts and Sergeant Tom Greco from Charlie Company, Sergeant First Class Wayne John, Staff Sergeant Sam Joseph and myself from A Company. We were later joined in country by Staff Sergeant Larry Hoff.⁶

Isolation and mission prep was particularly challenging for all MTT's leaving Ft. Devens; lack of intel, no language training, and the promise of needed supplies on the training end. As was the case with all MTT's, members were chosen at higher, subject matter was assigned and rehearsed and normal POR activities, pre-mission medicals, and shots

were updated along with new identification cards for junior enlisted personnel. All personnel in the grades E4/E5 were given the brevet rank of E-6, to include ID cards. Financial support was coordinated between SATMO and the 10th Gp Comptroller for individual payment and disbursement of advances. A request for 80% of the 179 days was requested, but only 55% was granted. Subsequent payments would be made after completion of travel vouchers while in country and mailed back to Ft. Devens, MA.

The Course of Instruction implemented by the Cadre Training MTT consisted of twenty-eight days. Actual training days of this block was limited to twenty-three days due to the Lebanese Army desire for a two-day break approximately half-way through the course and the required movement days to move the battalions from the bivouac site near the airport to the mountain training locations (Roumieh and Wata al Jawz) and back to the original bivouac sites. Additionally, the twenty-eighth day of the cycle was used for the final Inspection/ Graduation Ceremony activities.

The first nine days of training were delegated to Individual Combat skills: bayonet fighting techniques, basic rifle marksmanship training, individual movement techniques, basic map reading, operation of the AN/PRC-77 and AN/VRC-46 radios and basic communications procedures, basic first aid, conditioning drills (physical training), individual combatives, land mines and basic demolitions. Additional instruction included: camouflage techniques, prisoner of war handling procedures, and throwing hand grenades. Subject areas were divided into three-day blocks. The three-line companies of each battalion were rotated through the three-day blocks

3. <https://www.soc.mil/USASFC/Groups/10th/history.html> (Note: Original AAR from MTT #1 reflects dates as 3/20/83 – 9/9/83 in their After Action Review. These dates are again reflected in the After Action Review from MTT #2.)

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

6. CW2 (Ret) Lou Pacelli notes provided, August 2020.



BRM Rifle ranges in Jounieh (Photo courtesy James Wiehe)

in a round-robin manner. Thus, on any given day, there were actually three different days of training until all companies were rotated through the entire nine days.

The next three days were devoted to squad level training and consisted of one day of squad organization and movement, squad offensive operations (movement to contact, hasty attack, fire, and movement), squad defensive operations (hasty and deliberate defense, withdrawals). Once the squad training was moved to the Wata al Jawz training area, a fourth day of training was added; a squad live-fire exercise for the squad leader to control. One of the break days was deleted to allow for the extra day of squad training.

A typical day began at 0500 hours followed by breakfast at 0530. Breakfast meals were made available at the hotel each day before departure. Departure time was 0600 to the various training sites. By 0630 training began and lasted until 1430 hours, with only minor breaks allotted. At this time, the Lebanese Forces being trained finished for the day and had their lunch. After lunch, the leadership of the battalion being trained would receive their overhead training (a reference to training to be conducted the next day). This activity ran from approximately 1530-1630 hours each day.

The seven days of advance training in the mountain training areas (Roumieh and Wata al Jawz) consisted of five days of platoon-level training and two days of company-level training. On Day #1 of the advance training, the platoons received instruction on platoon movement techniques (traveling, traveling over-watch, and bounding over-watch). Platoon defensive techniques were taught on the second day and included the same defensive operations that the squads had received earlier. The next two days were dedicated to patrolling operations and a night practical exercise. The last two days consisted of company-level offensive movement techniques and included a mechanized movement- to-contact operation for the mechanized battalions. The mounted movement was added only after this training had been moved to Wata al Jawz as there was no location to maneuver armored personnel carriers in the Roumieh training area. The last day was dedicated to the company-level live-fire exercise where all the weapons systems organic to the company were employed. Additionally, the 81mm mortar crews and the 106mm Recoilless Rifle crews were given six days of instruction prior to the live fire exercise. The weapons employed in the live-fire exercise consisted of mortars, recoilless rifles, .50cal heavy machine guns mounted on APCs, Mag



SFC Scotty Deraps conducting BRM training. (Photo courtesy James Wiehe)

58 machine gun, M-60 machine guns, RPGs, and the individual rifle, either M-16 or G-3.

The last four days of the training were given to Urban Operations training. The soldiers were trained on individual skills during the first day of this training; rappelling, entering a building, stairwell, room clearing techniques, and booby traps. On Day #2, the squads and platoons were put through practical exercises in clearing entire buildings. On the third day, each company executed an attack and a defensive operation in a built-up area. Each company executed the attack portion twice and the defensive once. Again, the companies were rotated in a round-robin manner. On the final day of Urban Operations Training, the Lebanese soldiers received instruction on security activities in an urban area. This training focused on practical exercises in patrolling in an urban environment and check-point operations.

MTT Security

MTT#1 had developed and employed a security plan and an evacuation plan in and around the Cadmos Hotel grounds when they arrived. The plan included static positions established in individual rooms that overlooked the street side of the hotel and the area side facing the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, there was an inter-roving patrol that included all the hotel floors, the lobby, and an especially worrisome one, the basement. Contained within the hotel basement was a disco bar and parking area. The parking entrance was blocked by a dirt berm and concertina wire. The bar itself, was set in complete darkness and once you left the elevator or staircase, you were in virtual darkness.

Security of personnel while in-country was a constant and daily issue. Because of the various political factions and militias, it was extremely difficult, if not totally impossible, to identify anyone organization as making threats upon MTT personnel. Therefore, it was standard procedure to treat every area as a hostile environment. The only exception to this was the area in the vicinity of Wata al Jawz.

Personal security measures were stressed on a daily basis. Upon arrival in-country, a request was immediately forwarded to OMC for weapons and was repeated almost on a weekly basis. Finally, the MTI's received six M-16 rifles for use in vehicles and security at the hotel. Later, 9mm Browning Hi-power pistols were issued to each member of the MTT along with "Second Chance" body armor vests. Transportation to and from training sites was judged to be the

most vulnerable aspect to the cadre and to overcome that issue routes, times, vehicles, and personnel were varied in order to break up any sort of pattern that might otherwise have been exhibited. Also, except for several select instances, MTT personnel were required to travel everywhere using the buddy-system. The Lebanese G-2 also employed plainclothes personnel in and around the hotel on a continuous basis. The number of LAF guards and G-2 personnel was increased based on the threat situation and/or request of the MTT Team Chief.

In a phone conversation between myself and BG Dick Potter⁷, the then 10th SF Group Commander, he explained that "... there were several contentious issues that arose for 10th SFG(A) during their participation of providing MTT's to the Lebanese government...". BG Potter's main concern was lodging. An officer from the U.S. Army's Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) wanted the troops housed and billeted with the U.S. Marines at the Beirut Airport. COL Potter disagreed and refused the arrangement citing his authority as a Title 10 Commander who was responsible for the care, welfare, and well-being of the soldiers under his command. COL Potter met with General Lutz (SOCOM Cdr) in Beirut, Lebanon and he was apprised of the situation and why his refusal was in the best interest of his soldiers performing the mission. Each unit deployed had established an inner and outer ring of security as they were in multiple locations conducting the training. NOTE: COL Potter's logic, foresight, and resolve for the welfare of the soldiers who were deployed while he was 10th Group Commander proved to be the right decision. Had the MTT's been housed in the Marine Corps Barracks at the Beirut Airport as insisted upon arrival, the possibility of those team members being seriously injured or killed on October 23 would have been inevitable.

Lessons Learned

Problems arose and lessons were re-learned with each MTT iteration. Some of the most prevalent "lessons learned" that would plague each MTT were recurring and somehow could not be solved:

1. Transportation. This was a problem that never seemed to go away. The drivers (who had little to no training driving) who were assigned to drive and transport us to our training sites were constantly late or were "no-shows". Drivers were with us for a few days and then were reassigned elsewhere and a new driver would show up. Vehicle maintenance was almost non-existent, and vehicles were constantly breaking down.
 2. French training. Up until our arrival, the Lebanese Officers & NCO's were being trained by the French. There was a clear lack of participation by the Lebanese Officers and NCO's. It was recommended
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7. 8/5/2019: Phone conversation with BG Dick Potter and Jim Wiehe, RE#: 10th Special Forces Group (A) 1983 MTT's into Beirut, Lebanon. BG Potter served as Commander of 10th SFG(A) from Dec 1981 – July 1984.



Providing security at the U.S. Embassy at the request of the Ambassador were: SSG McAvoy, SFC Cooper, SFC Wiehe (seated), SSG Freidman, SFC Tabor, SFC Stockert, and SSG Shaw (Photo courtesy James Wiehe)



SFC Dick Cooper with his counterpart.(Photo courtesy James Wiehe)

- that the LAF's leadership style be patterned after the U.S. Army. A constant challenge and problem were the "aloof" manner of leadership practiced by the officers. The officers as a group did not like to set the example or get deeply involved in training to the degree practiced in the U.S. Army. They were conscientious of the position and stature, which required the careful application of criticism and instruction. Blunt and frank appraisals were rarely well-received. Officers, if required to perform the tasks with their soldiers, frequently became detractors from training and sometimes discipline problems.
3. Language training. No language training was received by any MTT entering the country. Although there were up to 22 Lebanese

officers and NCOs assigned as interpreters, communication problems still arose. All MTT members had to learn on the job (OJT) by doing their own research on the language or memorizing how and what was being translated. After a while, words, phrases, and commands, like those on my rifle ranges, were being picked up and rehearsed by us. There were several reasons for this: time before deployment and, as usual, lack of funds.

4. In-country training support. The training support received by the MTT was less than adequate. This included support in the construction of the ranges and the ability to provide the materials necessary for the construction of the training facilities. There were no training aides or training areas identified. This lack of understanding was prevalent in the LAF G-3 and G4 until a LAF COL was placed in charge of the AUT program for the Lebanese, the problem would not get resolved.
5. Passport processing. The passport processing for MTT #2 was not as nearly the administrative problem that it was for MTT #1. The Bn S-1 was aware of all the requirements and processed the forms promptly. However, the problems arose where individuals were unable to promptly acquire a birth certificate with a raised seal from their home state. By the 3rd MTT iteration, this problem did not exist.
6. S-2 support. Upon arrival in-country, there was insufficient intelligence being disseminated to the MTT's. Additionally, this intel was also not available during isolation and team train-up. After lengthy discussions with the OMC (Office of Military Cooperation) and specifically, the April American Embassy bombing, two security personnel were brought in from EUCOM. At this point, the MTT's began to receive daily updates through the OMB Security Officer.
7. Effects of weather on training. The heat during July – August made training for the ITT personnel very difficult, but not impossible. Extra effort was made to quickly identify and treat any heat-related injuries. The heat also made it next to impossible to train in the ITT airport areas all afternoon. You were exposed to the sun all day with no shade available. Training normally stopped at 14 hours due to the extreme heat. Conversely, the heat had little to effect on the ATT personnel training in the mountains. And the snow in the mountains in March – April made it impossible to recon many potential maneuver areas. The cool, rainy winters did not stop training, but it made a mess in the lowland areas.
8. During training. When the M113s arrived in-country, the transmissions were filled with shipping fluid and not the correct transmission fluid required. The shipping fluid needed to be drained and new transmission fluid added IAW the TM-10. The Lebanese did not know this and consequently burned out many transmissions.

Siege of the Cadmos Hotel

On August 29, 1983, all training of the Lebanese Armed Forces had ceased. Personnel who were transported to the training site near the airport were greeted by our interpreter, Mohammad Chukeyr who quickly explained to us that the Mechanized Infantry Battalion in training had departed during the night after a message over a loudspeaker. The message told to the commander was “to defect

with all men and equipment or your wives and children would be killed.” It was immediately after this conversation that it began to rain down 155mm howitzer shells from the Chouf Mountains above us. The Druze militia and the Syrian gun positions had a “direct-lay” upon us. We took several rounds and made our way back to our vehicle and departed the training site. This would be the beginning of a 30-day siege for us at the Cadmos Hotel. We assumed a “static” role and training ceased.

There is very little written of this event and only “references” by the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* on September 1st and September 2nd.⁸ Even the Marine account of what happened in Eric Hammel's, *The Root*, notes that the U.S. Marines were called to evacuate us from the hotel due to safety concerns expressed by the attacking Druze militiamen. Robert Pugh, the U.S. Embassy Charge d'Affaires was summoned to the guard post at the embassy when a Druze Officer arrived (who was pro-American) and stated that “he was on an errand of mercy and had been ordered to attack the LAF unit bivouacked near the Cadmos Hotel that housed 70 U.S. Army Special Forces trainers and saw no reason to involve the American Marines, as he called the Green Berets and asked that they be removed.”⁹ Pugh notes on page 141-142 that: “Though there had been sufficient room, barely, for all the Special Forces trainers, the first contingent had opted to carry out its gear, and, to the amazement and ire of the Marines, their personal effects and souvenirs — including a man-sized teddy bear that took up one whole vehicle seat.”¹⁰ I have it on good authority that one of us “did indeed” take his teddy bear, but it was strapped on top of his rucksack and most likely mistaken for a full-sized rucksack.

On August 30th violence once again broke out in the city, this time along the Corniche and down from the newly relocated American Embassy. A Druze militia, loyal to the Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt, augmented security around the British Embassy. The militiamen, recognizable in their red berets and camouflage fatigues, provided an invaluable and reliable ring of deterrence surrounding the chancery where the British and American diplomats went to work each morning.¹¹

Ten thousand Lebanese soldiers, using tanks and helicopters, launched a three-pronged attack in West Beirut to try and flush out rebellious Druze and Shiite Moslem militiamen. Both the Moslem western sector of Beirut and the eastern Christian sector came under heavy-weapons bombardment. During the day, hundreds of Lebanese Army Forces were locked in fierce combat with the Druze militiamen who were entrenched in the 25-story Holiday Inn just blocks away from us.

The hotel was prepared for combat having an eight-foot berm surrounding and topped with concertina wire and a 106mm recoilless rifle aimed out the main entryway. More importantly, the hotel had a fully stocked restaurant and bar; that is until the siege. As part of

8 *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Sept 1, 1983, No. 243. Fierce battling engulfs Beirut and Sept 2, No. 244, 10,000 troops vs. Beirut militias.

9. Eric Hammel, *The Root, The Marines in Beirut August 1982 – February 1984*. Pg138 – 142. Zenith Press. 1984.

10. Ibid, page 141-142.

11. Fred Burton and Samuel M. Katz. *The Murder of a CIA Station Chief and Hezbollah's War Against America*, Penquin Random House, 2018.



SSG's Henterly (with M16 and Emerling (pistol) reacting to sniper fire. (Photo courtesy James Wiehe)

our “ring of security” while in-country, initially, there was a squad of Lebanese Army Forces situated in and around the base of our hotel. As the situation outside of the hotel and the surrounding area became more volatile, our security force was increased to a reinforced platoon size element with an accompanying M1A1 jeep with a 106 recoilless rifle. With nothing more than the underground entrance being filled with dirt and an outside dirt berm with concertina wire on top, the hotel became our Alamo. Also, on every floor of the hotel, and in strategic locations with vantage points, there were guard posts. These guard posts were manned with 2-hour shifts whenever we were in the hotel. (Note: After the ‘siege’ we were issued FN FAL 7.62 rifles along with our sidearms.) The street side of the hotel was our most vulnerable side. It was just yards away from the civilians living across the street and well within shooting distance from snipers and rocket fire. Sniper fire from across the street of the hotel and an occasional RPG burst was the norm for the duration of the 30 days we were in the hotel.

What happened next was an air-assault by a LAF rifle squad on the street directly in front of the bombed-out embassy who returned fire into the embassy with rifles and machine guns and made their way towards the Cadmos Hotel. Sometime near dusk, a vehicle convoy arrived to take all of us to the American Embassy. At the time, we were told that the ambassador (Bartholomew) had requested additional support for his Marine guards, not the other way around. There were not nearly enough vehicles to take all 70 of us, so a handful was selected to go and to take their individual kit and rucksacks along.

As we loaded up and began our departure, artillery air burst rounds exploded between us and the embassy down the street. As we headed towards the embassy, the air bursts continued to plague our movement. Simultaneously, as we maneuvered around the barriers in the street, we were suddenly dodging RPGs that were being fired from behind us. Luckily, the RPGs struck street barriers or fizzled and sparked down the Cornish like a roman candle being hand-held.



T-shirt designed by SSG Doug Wheless upon our return home. (Photo courtesy James Wiehe)

When we arrived at the embassy, we were issued 12-gauge shotguns and given a sector of responsibility as the Druze militia were now working their way through the city and being chased by the LAF. For the next two days, we continued to provide security until we were told that the Druze militiamen who were firing upon us were now seeking sanctuary in the embassy from the pursuing LAF. One can only shake his head.

When the shooting stopped, we were loaded back up and taken back to the hotel. On a side note, our team medic (SSG Doug Wheless) who was an amateurish artist created a t-shirt when we got back depicting the hotel siege.

After things quieted down a bit, we were moved to a quieter place along the Mediterranean coast further west to the coastal town of Jounieh. We had to start from scratch to establish a training area. ❖



10th Special Forces Group in Beirut

At the time this story was printed in the *Sentinel*, Jim Wiehe was selling his book “10th Special Forces Group (A) in Beirut, Lebanon” and donating the profits from the sales to the Green Beret Foundation. The book was very popular and has been sold-out for a while. There are discussion on the table to reprint this publication. Stay tuned for updates.

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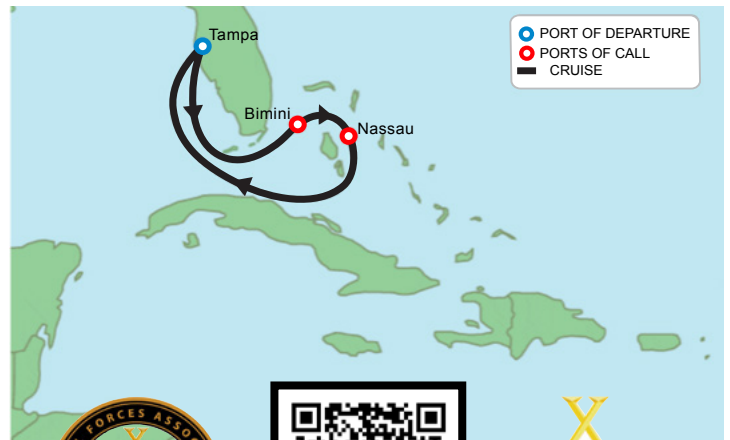
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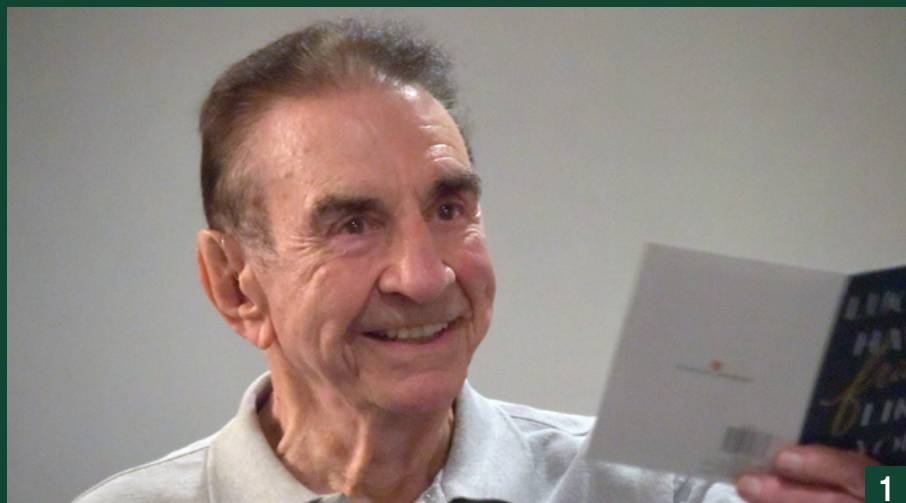
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SFA Chapter 78 met on July 20, 2024, at the Courtyard by Marriott in Cypress, CA. This was a mostly a business meeting, but we also celebrated Chapter Treasurer Richard Simonian's 92nd birthday. The custom cake for Richard was designed by Arin Brandenburg (learn more about Arin [@sweetbabyas_cakes](#) on Instagram)

- 1** Richard Simonian looks over the card presented to him by members of the chapter.
- 2** Richard cuts his birthday cake..
- 3** Chapter President Aaron Brandenburg
- 4** Chapter VP James McLanahan
- 5** Nimo, the hard working Project Manager of Refugee Housing in Mojave, provides an update on the state of the community.
- 6** How Miller, editor of the Sentinel, and his wife, Nancy.
- 7** Jim Cragg
- 8** Long-time chapter member Art Dolick and Erik Berg.
- 9** Chapter members gathered for a group photo at the end of the meeting.

To see additional photos taken at the meeting visit www.specialforces78.com and select the chapter meeting page from the *Sentinel* list of articles for September.

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